DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 118 143 IR 003 049

TITLE	Cable Television; What's in It fo Teachers? A Handbook for State and Local Education Associations.
INSTITUTION	National Education Association, Washington, D.C. Div. of Instruction and Professional Development.
PUB DATE	[75]
NOTE	17p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS	*Cable Television; Community Antennas; *Educational Television; *Guidelines; Instructional Media; *Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS	Federal Communications Commission; *National Education Association

ABSTRACT

This handbook lists the reasons why educators at the local level should become involved in the development of education television programs for cable television. Developed by the National Education Association (NEA), it encourages use of the cable channels set aside for education by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) before the channels are re-allocated for other uses. A brief discussion of what cable television is and how it can benefit education is followed by reasons why schools should use it and how cable TV can serve teachers, students, parents, and the community. Suggestions for workshops for teachers, how to get started in television programing, and how to get programs on the cable are presented. Ideas for funding sources are also given. (HB)

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Cable Television

What's In It For Teachers?

A Handbook for State and Local Education Associations

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A Matter Of Urgency

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has set aside one channel for educational use in all cable systems built since 1972 in the top 100 TV markets. Use of the educational channel has been without charge from the time subscriber service is inaugurated until five years after the completion of the cable system's basic trunk line. The FCC is presently reassessing whether or not this channel allocation should be continued. In most cities throughout the nation, educators have failed to program the educational channel that has been set aside in their community. It is therefore imperative that educators have programming on the air as rapidly as possible in order to preserve this valuable resource. Cable offers special opportunities for state and local teachers associations as an in-service education vehicle, as a public relations medium, and as a means of improving instruction in the classroom. Cable can be a powerful force in helping teachers teach.

Why This Booklet?

Cable TV once again is capturing the headlines. After a recession-induced slowdown, the development of this flexible new means of communication is gathering momentum, particularly in suburban and rural areas where fewer TV channels are available. It will come also to large cities when legal arrangements, now in process, permit cable services for which citizens are willing to pay, such as first-run movies, plays, sports, and local programming not carried on TV stations.

Cable TV can be a valuable asset to education if it is planned and used by those who understand the teaching-learning process. And that's the point. This booklet is designed to encourage and assist imaginative and creative teachers, through their professional associations, to assume leadership in the development of a plan to capitalize on the educational potential of cable TV in their respective communities. Education by cable is a reality in a number of communities. Teachers should have a voice in planning its use. Now is the time—while cable TV is young and while educational access channels are still available—for teachers to take the lead in shaping its destiny based on what cable TV is, what it can do as an educational tool, and what procedures must be considered for productive results. NEA stands ready to help.[1]

Why Should Teachers Take The Lead?

Too often, innovations in education are introduced without teacher involvement in planning. Yet teachers, more than any other segment of the educational community, know best the learning needs of students, and what works and what does not. The beginning status of cable TV offers an unusual opportunity for teachers to get in on the ground floor in guiding the educational uses of this new technology.

Teachers associations are a logical choice to develop a plan of action; assess how and what cable TV can contribute to education; outline program possibilities to meet learner and teacher needs; design procedures to bring together all those who are

[1] Teachers in communities where cable franchises are still being negotiated are referred to NEA's publication CABLE TELEVISION: FRANCHISE PROVISIONS FOR SCHOOLS. For additional information, write to NEA, Instruction and Professional Development, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

needed for the implementation of the plan—administrators, cable TV operators, student and community representatives.

By initiating a design for action, teachers would become catalysts to spark cooperative effort and generate momentum among community entities to bring the plan to successful fruition.

What Is Cable TV?

Cable TV is a community system capable of distributing TV signals over many channels (usually 20 per system) through cables strung overhead or placed underground. Because the signals do not travel through the air as is the case with open-circuit TV, there is virtually no interference and a clear, stable TV picture is obtained. A cable system can transmit signals from local VHF and UHF stations, and it can also import signals from distant stations beyond usual reception limits.

A cable operator, in return for the expense of installing high antennas to pick up station signals and installing cables over which the signals are distributed, charges a fee, usually $6 to $9 per month, to link the system to locations where the cable services are desired—homes, schools, libraries, hotels, and industries. The cable company also may offer special attractions—sports events, plays, first-run movies—for an additional fee. The latter is called pay cable or pay TV.

The financial arrangements whereby schools are linked to cable systems vary among communities, and are mentioned later.

The link connecting a school with the cable is only part of the necessary hardware. In order for classrooms and other locations within a school to receive cable TV programs, there must be an internal closed-circuit system linking classrooms to the school antenna. Many schools presently have such installations so that TV receivers can be plugged into the antenna. All that is needed, then, to connect schools in the community into a network is a link to the main cable trunk line.

It is important that teacher associations, in their plans for cable TV, explore with cable TV operators the possible technical arrangements for distribution of school programs on the cable. Teachers must know what time is available, whether programs will be distributed live or pre-recorded, from what origination points, and whether school studios can be "patched" into the system. The decisions will depend, in part, on the technical capabilities of both the school and system installations. These matters must be considered in the teachers association's exploratory efforts.

Why Should Schools Use Cable?

A cable TV system is capable of offering schools additional channels for the distribution of programs and other information. Therefore, it can expand the number and variety of programs available, at more flexible times than are possible on a one-channel, open-circuit TV station. Cable TV does not replace open-circuit instructional TV, where it exists; cable TV simply increases the available options.

In addition, programs produced by and for teachers and students, on their own equipment (small cameras and videotape recorders) can be distributed over the cable since the technical requirements of the Federal Communications Commission for open-circuit broadcasting do not apply. In simple language, this means that the large, cumbersome, and very expensive cameras and videotape recorders required for a TV station's studios are not required for cable-casting. Thus, schools can use less expensive and more maneuverable equipment, including the new porta-pak recording units, available for either black-and-white or color production.

Another advantage of the cable linkage to schools is that school studios, even simple ones, can be "patched" into the system so that programs can be exchanged among schools on the cable. This capability is not immediately available but should be provided for in planning for the future. Actually, the cable makes possible a school network that may include one or more school districts.

As the state of the art progresses, there will be two-way audio, and eventually two-way video, to permit discussions between school viewers and the teacher or specialist originating the program.

These capabilities offer a wide spectrum of applications to the teaching-learning process. Many teachers will recognize the potential benefits and will use cable TV in appropriate, creative ways.

How Can Cable TV Serve Teachers?

It is important that teachers determine among themselves how cable can help them fulfill their own unmet needs for professional development. Of high importance also is how cable can serve the needs of the National Education Association (1) by creating a greater public awareness of the NEA's program and objectives and (2) by providing a means to obtain

a balanced assessment of the critical issues facing education in our time. Some specific suggestions follow:

1. Professional Development

a. Teacher centers on the cable—A local teachers association might consider activating, through the local school district and the local cable operator, a weekly **teacher-centered** teaching center on the cable. The emphasis of this proposal is on the need for practicing teachers to determine the content of their own professional development. A user-developed, user-evaluated airborne teacher center would be a unique experiment for cable. Possible program features of such a series could include:

(1) teachers' telephoning in problems or questions to be solved or answered on the cable by a panel of experts (their peers, specialists, administrators, parents). Specific topics would be featured at certain times. Questions could also be mailed in advance.

(2) short, tightly organized programs that highlight teaching skills especially needed by teachers

(3) in-depth analyses of the tensions of teaching

(4) interviews with guest teachers and other experts requested by the viewing audience

(5) exchanges of ideas between teachers on "what works for me in the classroom."

b. Televised open-learning courses for credit—Under the sponsorship of the local teachers association, a course might be offered for credit on cable TV by the local or regional university on a topic (or topics) agreed upon by the association, with financial participation by the local school district.

c. Programs by and for teachers in which teachers demonstrate effective teaching strategies and exchange good classroom practices, such as ways of:

. . . dealing with problems concerning discipline and violence

. . . improving human relations in the classroom setting

. . . promoting inquiry and improving questioning skills

. . . increasing insights and competencies in the teaching of reading

. . . using video recordings for self-evaluation

. . . using instructional media with maximum effectiveness.

2. Association Programs on the Cable

a. An "Association Hour" on the cable giving highlights for

teachers of association activities, the NEA annual meeting, discussion of resolutions and policies, and an exchange of information about activities of local UniServ units

b. A televised round table on "Critical Issues in Education," utilizing local panelists to react to a film sequence from NEA Central in Washington or from other sources. Panelists could include teachers, students, parents, and community leaders.

c. "Law and the Teacher"—a series of programs on cable to acquaint teachers with the implications of federal and state laws affecting teachers and teacher practices on such urgent topics as copyright, educational neglect, child abuse, tenure, and a variety of other important issues.

d. A locally produced series by teachers aimed at enhancing the image of the teacher as a person, as a citizen, and as a politician. Programs would include interviews with sparkling teacher personalities, film footage of good teachers at work, interviews with people on the street, etc.

How Can Cable TV Serve Students?

1. Productions by Students

Cable offers teachers an enormous opportunity to encourage students to think creatively about the uses of the TV camera and the videotape recorder in producing their own student-made productions for presentation on cable systems. Student video clubs have already been formed in many schools, and exchanges of videotapes are already under way between a number of these clubs. If video porta-pak equipment is not available in a given school, such equipment might be borrowed from a neighboring school or from the central educational media office of the school district to get program production under way. Often students who are not interested in schoolwork per se will suddenly be "turned on" when given the opportunity to set up lights, connect microphones, operate a camera, design artwork, or participate in a program to be aired on the local cable system. This aspect of educational cable TV provides valuable experiences in career education.

Many potential dropouts have completed high school and entered post-high school electronics institutes as a result of such small, exciting beginnings. Teachers associations might capitalize on the career education values inherent in student involvement in both the technical and programming aspects of cable TV production.

Student video explorations are also under way with increasing success at the elementary and junior high school levels. A directory is available listing schools in one part of the nation that have paired with schools in another part of the nation to exchange student-made productions.[1] The directory also lists schools that are seeking to exchange videotapes with other schools.

In addition to student-made productions, teen-age students may be helped by viewing professionally produced, open-ended dramatizations in which a problem is faced and a decision must be made. The program ends at the point of decision making. Topics that students have requested for inclusion in such a series include drugs, drinking, sex, getting along with parents, dropping out of school, etc. Such a series, by and for students, may provide a basis for lively discussions at home, at club meetings, etc.

[1]Kathleen U. Busick, Project Coordinator. STUDENT VIDEO EXPLORATIONS. Report and Directory to Schools Exchanging Half-Inch TV Tapes. With the assistance of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology; Don Wylie, President, Division of Telecommunications. First edition. Washington, D.C.: Association for Educational Communications and Technology, February 1975.

2. Instructional Programs for Students In and Out of Schools

The association's role in instructional programming in the classroom is usually limited to causing others to produce quality programs. If the school district does not present instructional television opportunities as part of its curricular offerings, the association might well include this in its negotiations package. Teachers in those schools that have instructional programming on the cable or on public broadcasting channels frequently point out the value of such programs in expanding student horizons and in providing high quality learning opportunities to meet specialized learning needs of students. Typical of such programs are the following:

. . . programs to help children learn another language and to learn about cultures other than their own

. . . career education programs designed to introduce students to exciting career opportunities, including those open to children with specific physical handicaps

. . . curricular offerings for deaf children with captions or sign language superimposed or added

. . . presentations for homebound children with two-way audio between student and teacher. Such programs are especially adaptable for cable use.

. . . metric education for students at all levels in anticipation of a future transition to the metric system in the U.S.

. . . student exploration of community improvement to arouse citizen support for cleaner streets, creation of playlots, urban renewal, highway safety, teen-age recreation facilities, and other local causes. Such programs also lend themselves to student video productions.

. . . disease prevention through information on immunization campaigns

. . . consumer education series for high school students: simple "how to do it" programs, e.g., opening a bank account, making loans

. . . programs to inform students on crises and to rally support for finding solutions to problems concerning food, energy, the economy, and ecology.

How Can Cable TV Serve Parents And Other Community Members?

Cable TV offers excellent opportunities for programs to help citizens better understand the objectives and activities of the schools and thereby gain taxpayer support. Such programs will not only help parents and schools but will also attract additional subscribers to the cable system.

Typical programs might include:

. . . for parents of preschool children, presentations to help them with preparation of their children for school, health and growth needs, etc.

. . . for parents of school-age children, discussions and demonstrations to help their children get the most out of school (attempting to overcome the problem of parent apathy about their children's education)

. . . student performances in music, art, science, dance, drama

. . . student sports activities televised for community viewing

. . . panels of teachers, parents, students, and school officials to answer questions phoned in to the studio on such matters as new curricula, report cards, discipline, and other topics of concern to parents

. . . discussions of needs of schools to head off budget cuts and justify budget increases.

Cable can also present programs that are helpful to parents of young children in their "parenting" roles and in better understanding the child-rearing process.

Are Teachers Expected To Become Program Producers?

No—and yes! Teachers are not expected to produce programs that are to be aired for the general public on cable systems. (Those programs

for the most part require skill and expertise by individuals professionally trained in television production.) Although the great majority of teachers will not become producers, even the most talented need some grasp of the simple but important fundamentals of TV production if they are to plan programs of substance and impact. In some instances where equipment (cameras, videotape recorders, microphones, etc.) is available in schools, teachers find themselves in the role of producer, with results worthy of distribution over the cable.

Teachers are in a position to suggest the kinds of programs that will help students learn. And teachers should select the people—experts from many fields—who could present most effectively the material, information, or learning experience desired. A teacher from one of NEA's local or state associations who may have achieved outstanding results in the field of reading, or the skills of an outstanding reading specialist from a local university might be tapped to present a cable series. Or a parent who is both a scientist and a gifted communicator might be willing to present an exciting series of demonstrations. Or the teachers might call on a local teacher of the deaf to accompany a presentation with simultaneous sign language for deaf students. These are a few examples of how teacher associations may identify useful program content and may tap community resources for quality presentations.

Teachers also should explore the possibilities for students to "do their own thing." The drama coach may want to record on videotape the student enactment of a play for evaluation by the cast and then, when the dramatization is perfected, offer the tape for cable distribution to other schools and to other subscribers. Teachers of racially and culturally mixed classes may conduct a particularly significant "rap session" on racial and cultural understanding that would be valuable for students in other schools. These are not the usual studio productions. They are, rather, student activities that can be recorded on school equipment, by student operators, and then distributed on the cable. The school making the recording may be "patched" into the cable, or the videotape may be delivered to an origination point, in another school, or at the origination point of the cable operator.

Many schools with TV cameras and videotape recorders have set up a room to be used as a studio, with plain walls for background. Usually students find ways to improvise light stands. And they construct flats from large cardboard cartons that they paint in attractive colors. Teachers have been surprised and delighted at the response of students to the small, relatively inexpensive pieces

of electronic equipment and the ease with which visuals can be created inexpensively by students themselves. Suddenly a studio is created, and apathetic students become eager impressarios. Skillful teachers use such interest in motivating students to learn.

Even if a trained production specialist is available, much time and energy will be saved if teachers and curriculum specialists involved in programming receive some production training. Workshops planned by and for teachers, with the help of experienced TV producers, are recommended. NEA can suggest possible resource persons who might be available to help.

Workshops for Teachers

Workshops should include hands-on experience with cameras, microphones, lighting, and videotape recorders in the production of simple programs timed from beginning to end. These training sessions should involve not only teachers of basic disciplines, but also those from special fields: art teachers can learn how to prepare titles, graphs, drawings, charts; shop teachers can study set design and construction, lighting and microphone improvisation; music teachers can assist with selection of background music, etc. All may become motivated to present exciting programs featuring their respective subject areas.

In small school districts, the workshops may be held in one location. In large districts the sessions probably will be more manageable if they are planned in each of the decentralized, smaller areas of the school system. One or two teachers from each school might be invited. They will learn what cable TV is, its possibilities as an educational tool, the overall community plan envisioned by the teachers association, and some of the rudiments of TV production. These teachers then will relay the information to their respective faculties, so that the plan and its objectives will become known throughout the school system.

It is from such workshops that teachers with unrealized potential have emerged to become skilled TV teachers and producers. These individuals may form a production base to assist with existing ITV for the school district or they may initiate production at the appropriate time as the teachers association's plan evolves.

How Does A Teachers Association Get Started In Programming?

After the association has made the decision to move ahead with programming on the cable, a workable and educationally viable plan of operation should be developed to avoid fractionated, ill-conceived efforts that could lead to frustration, delay, and waste.

Here are a few suggestions on how to get started:

A. Appoint or activate an existing overall communications committee from the teachers association and key representatives of the school district, including the ITV coordinator if there is one. From this committee set up subcommittees of appropriate personnel to achieve the committee goals:

1. A committee for needs assessment and program possibilities to:
   a. compile a tentative list of association needs and goals that might be served by cable TV
   b. from the above, develop a list of possible cable TV programs and activities relevant to teacher/student needs
   c. outline possible resources expert teachers, specialists, lay citizens—who might be "talent for desired presentations"
   canvass association membership to obtain their priorities from the programs suggested
   e. determine the nature of the series to be aired.

   NOTE: This committee is listed first because the human values—the "software"—of educational cable TV must be the primary reason for the development of the hardware.

2. A strategy committee to enlist the support of school district and community decision makers. This might be a small but effective steering committee to:
   a. present the envisioned plan to the superintendent and/or the administrative cabinet, with facts to document the values. NEA will help furnish information on request.
   b. request the opportunity to present the plan to the board of education or the appropriate board committee.

3. A committee to develop community awareness for the series which are contemplated. It could:
   a. inform association members through the association newsletter about the cable TV programs anticipated
   b. arrange meetings with the local parent-teacher associations, principals' groups, and other community organiza-

tions to inform them of the plan, and obtain feedback

B. With the support of the superintendent and the board, approach the cable TV operator to explore:

. . . whether a free or reduced-cost channel will be made available

. . . whether the time needed can be obtained

. . . whether studio and production personnel can be counted on

. . . whether film and slide projectors will be available in addition to cameras and microphones

. . . whether the schools and the association's headquarters have been linked to the cable system

. . . whether the cable reaches all sections of the city.

How Does A Program Get On The Cable?

This question gets to the heart of the matter. Presumably, at this stage of the plan the committee on assessment of needs and program identification has done its work. The programs to be produced have been indicated. Wise leadership will seek out the services of a specialist trained in production to help teachers plan and produce desired programs. The instructional television coordinator, or a public TV station producer, may fill this role. The teachers responsible for preparing the content, along with the ITV coordinator, will plan how the message can be presented interestingly, in what sequence, and with what visuals—photos, artwork, films, slides, etc. A script is prepared. The participants and materials are then rehearsed in a "walk through" to determine the best use of time (pacing) for impact. The program is timed. Titles are prepared, and background music is selected.

At this point, the program ingredients are moved to the studio. Lighting and microphones are set. Camera shots are rehearsed. Students may be assigned to flip the title cards, start the background music on cue, and operate the videotape recorder. On cue from a designated person, the whole operation begins. The camera moves from the titles to the opening of the program, and the performer is cued to begin talking. At the closing, the performer is given time cues. Many performers prepare a two-minute closing, and move to it at the two-minute cue so that the program ends smoothly.

The video tape then is evaluated. If it is acceptable to all concerned, it is transported to the previously agreed upon origination point for distribution at the desired time.

Schedules of program topics and times should be prepared and distributed to teachers and schools well in advance, so that teachers can plan for effective utilization of instructional television programs at school

or know when to watch association programs at home.

NOTE: This section cannot be concluded without a special word on program preparation. It is not enough just to get something on videotape. The end result should be of substantial instructional value, interestingly presented. Even with minimal equipment it is possible to achieve good audio and acceptable lighting. The camera work, even with one small camera with a zoom lens (which means that it can move from wide angle to close-up shots) can and should be smooth and in focus, and should show clearly what the performer intended. No one expects a network extravaganza, and none should be attempted, but sloppy production is not fair to the medium and to those it is capable of serving well. Thoughtful program planning and intelligent use of the equipment, whether by a trained specialist or by a teacher who has learned the techniques, are imperative.

Who Pays For Education Via Cable TV?

Good question! Obviously, educational services by cable are not free any more than are the services of public broadcasting stations. However, there are a number of options in developing operating arrangements between schools and cable operators. For example, cable operators may offer cable distribution for school programs in exchange for the use of a school studio during hours when it is not in use.

Some cable companies provide portable cameras and videotape recorders (porta-pak) equipment for student use in covering community activities for showing on the cable. In a number of communities the cable company turns over its production facilities to the schools one or more nights a week; in some cases the students not only plan the programs, they also operate the equipment—cameras, lights, microphones—and create the artwork and photography.

Good school programs, regularly produced, and used by both schools and homes, are welcomed by cable entrepreneurs, because these programs help the operators meet their responsibility for public service. They also attract paying subscribers with special interests—parents who gain insights on school activities, homebound students, sports enthusiasts, handicapped viewers, preschool children and their parents.

In the final analysis, most of the costs of cable TV for education may have to be borne by the schools. Cable is, however, less expensive than open-circuit production because less expensive equipment can be used. But teacher time and materials, along with equipment purchase and maintenance, must be considered. If the facilities are planned and used

well, the values received are at bargain rates.

The FCC has been requiring that all cable systems built since 1972 in the top 100 TV market areas provide at least one educational access channel without charge from the time subscriber service is inaugurated until five years after the completion of the cable trunk line. Currently, the FCC is reassessing its regulations regarding access channels to determine whether to expand or curtail the free use of channels for education. It is possible that FCC's current rules regarding educational access will be modified or dropped. Consequently, it is more important than ever that educators make use of the channels that have been provided them. If educators have allowed these channels—now accessible—to lie fallow, they may never again be available for education. It is imperative, therefore, that associations begin programming now on the cable system in their communities so that educational channels won't be forever lost to education.

If an association is in one of the top 100 TV market areas and wishes exclusive use of a channel for its association's programs, it will need to lease that channel from the cable operator. The costs of such leasing will vary from community to community, depending largely on the degree of cooperation worked out between the educator and the cable entrepreneur.

If an association is not in one of the top 100 TV market areas, it will need to negotiate with the cable operator for a free or reduced-cost channel for its association programs. Such channel would of course have to be shared with other educational groups, schools, and colleges in the area. Again, an association could choose to lease an additional channel from the cable operator exclusively for its purposes so as to obtain the time it most needs. Leasing a cable channel would, in essence, be the equivalent of having your own television station for association use.

It is important that unreasonable demands for free services not be made on cable operators. The best bet for getting the most for the least is by arriving at a plan together wherein each party will share responsibility for certain aspects of the partnership. For example, where the school system or local college already owns TV production facilities, the cable system about to begin local cablecasting may be a ready tenant or lessee of production services. In other cases the cable operator may have already constructed a studio facility for program origination on the cable, and it will be the school system that is interested in developing local programs for its own use.

How Can Funds For Cable Services Be Obtained?

School districts that are currently using instructional TV already have a precedent for the expenditure of funds for this service. If the cable TV plan promises to meet real needs, it should not be difficult to gain financial support, at least for a beginning, from several sources. However, in order to attract necessary funding, a plan of substance and recognized value must be carefully developed, be presented in understandable form, and be persuasive.

1. The school district that uses ITV probably will agree to expand the allocation for additional channels cable TV will provide. They may also be willing to assign specialized personnel to assist the association with production.

2. Agencies with special interests—such as handicapped, deaf, blind, drug prevention, the aging—may fund series for the benefit of these special viewers.

3. The U.S. Office of Education allocates grants for certain programs—basic skills, staff development, disadvantaged, equal opportunity, bilingual, handicapped, to mention a few. Most school districts have expert proposal writers for special projects.

4. Local businesses and industries often finance series related to career education in their respective fields.

5. Some foundations are interested in supporting innovative experiments, such as determining the teaching-learning effectiveness of cable TV programs designed to improve achievement in reading, math, science, etc.

In Conclusion

This is just a starter. Each state or local teachers association interested in taking the important step to develop educational programs on cable TV will need to evaluate the local situation and determine the most productive procedures. Leadership for such an undertaking will require vision, courage, wisdom, and a pioneer spirit. But if teachers don't move on cable TV, others will. Now is the time. NEA stands ready to help.

Develop a plan based on facts; present it strategically; and guide its implementation with and among appropriate and cooperative agencies. The community will benefit, its teachers and its children most of all.

Good luck!